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STATE FOR EUR/NB, CA/OCS (M. URBINA-MITTNACHT)
FRANKFURT FOR RSC-RCO RBROWN

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SUBJECT: A VIEW FROM BEHIND BARS: VILNIUS'S LUKISKES
PRISON

REF: VILNIUS 82

1. This is the second cable in a two-part series detailing efforts law enforcement in Lithuania's capital of Vilnius is taking to meet the increased demand upon its services by a burgeoning tourist industry, and a review of Vilnius's local criminal justice facilities.

2. Summary. Lithuania maintains a highly structured and transparent prison system that fully complies with EU and international norms for the treatment and housing of the perpetrators of crime. Americans charged with more serious infractions of Lithuania's penal code will reside in the former tsarist "model" prison of Lukiskes in a special wing with other foreign nationals until their cases are resolved. During a site visit to this principal penitentiary for Vilnius, senior administrators told Consular staff that while conditions are humane, they face overcrowding and a shortage of financing that can affect the quality of services it provides to inmates. End Summary.

3. Three members of Post's consular staff, including a Vice Consul, Senior ACS FSN, and Fraud Assistant on January 17 toured Vilnius' Lukiskes prison. Staff met with Lukiskes Prison Director Arvydas Izicka and Deputy Director Jonas Malaskevicius. Discussions with interlocutors were open and frank, and consular staff were offered complete access to the entire facility. Consular staff toured the renovated maximum-security wing, and the respective non-renovated wings housing minimum-security inmates and juveniles. Staff also toured the prison's chapel and art studio.

Lukiskes Prison

4. Americans who face criminal charges in Vilnius above the simple misdemeanor level (reftel) will be transferred within 48 hours from the police station where they were held following their arrest to Lukiskes prison, where they will be held until the resolution of their case. Foreigners are housed separately from the general population in single or double-occupancy cells. Those of the same nationality, when possible, are housed together.

Facilities

5. Built in 1904 as a model prison of modernity by tsarist authorities, the Lukiskes penitentiary remains Vilnius's largest facility. Though its residents include all strata of the criminal justice system, from teenagers and women to maximum-security inmates, the prison's primary function is to serve as a temporary housing facility for those following arraignment, participating in their trial, or awaiting sentencing. Though the prison's current population stands some 200 inmates above its maximum occupancy of 864, the prison's leadership proudly noted the humane treatment and myriad of services available to inmates. The prison, they said, has hosted three inspections from the EU's Committee on Human Rights, as well as a visit by the Queen of Sweden. Some 400 guards and administrative personnel staff the prison. The facility holds 70 maximum-security inmates in single cell housing in a newly renovated wing. Separate buildings house the medium- and minimum-security wings, with some 145 inmates of the former living in generally two-person cells, and some 75 non-violent offenders of the latter category living communally. Other buildings house some ten juvenile offenders between the ages of 16-18, and approximately 40 women.

6. The prison's population sees a great deal of turnover, because some 700 prisoners are temporarily housed as their cases wind through the court system before being released or transferred to other long-term housing facilities throughout Lithuania. Long-term housing facilities for juvenile and female prisoners, for example, are located in the cities of Kaunas and Panevezys, respectively.

----- Renovations and Services -----

17. Interlocutors said that funding shortfalls dragged out renovations to the maximum-security wing, with a price tag of 180,000 USD, over a ten-year period. They hope that Lithuania's accession to the EU in 2004 will spur additional allotments for renovations from Lithuania's parliament, since most inmates inhabit the non-renovated portions of the facility that may best be described as Soviet-ramshackle.

18. All permanent residents of the prison have the right to a TV, with cable hookup provided at no cost, a DVD or VCR player, and a computer, though Internet access is prohibited. Inmates are provided educational opportunities from vocational (such as IT) or GED classes to university and graduate programs. Educators from local institutions, such as Vilnius Pedagogical University, regularly visit the prison to provide instruction.

19. All permanent residents of the prison may work, though maximum- and minimum-security inmates are always kept apart. While most work for the prisoners is focused on maintaining the inmates and the facilities, the prison has an agreement with a Lithuanian-German venture for the production of wood products, such as birdhouses, rabbit hutches, and wine boxes. Representatives of the partnership regularly visit the prison to select inmates to work and to conduct quality control. The company pays inmates a wage, and EU labor laws govern the work. Though the German company keeps most of the profits, they do contribute money to a general welfare fund to assist inmates who do not work. Interlocutors note that approximately half of the inmates work in some capacity.

----- Nutrition -----

10. Claiming that the prisoners often eat better than the guards, interlocutors said that the prison provides sustenance that meets minimum EU caloric and nutrition guidelines. Post's medical officer, however, recently recommended augmenting daily protein and fiber intake for an American citizen-prisoner housed in a regional prison facility. All prisoners at Lukiskes may supplement their nutrition by purchasing food from the well-stocked "dry" prison canteen with money either earned through work at the prison or with funds credited to their account by friends or relatives. (NOTE: Interlocutors told us that in some EU countries prisoners may only use funds earned themselves in the prison canteen.) Though inmates may no longer receive care packages, relatives may bring food to the prison, and, in some cases, eat with the inmates in special administrative rooms.

----- Health Care -----

11. Every individual housed in the Lukiskes prison receives a comprehensive medical exam during in-processing, even if they were only transferred from another facility for a short time. HIV and TB screenings are part of this exam. Most medical care is provided by a nearby, though off-site, prison-run hospital. Psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers regularly visit the facility. A psychologist works full time in the juvenile wing. Interlocutors noted that the prison provides classes to inmates focused on such topics as HIV and suicide prevention as well as some nine "psychological" rehabilitation programs focused on such topics as drug and alcohol abuse.

----- Exercise -----

12. The prison has exercise facilities available to its long-term residents. The wing for juvenile offenders has its own exercise room, with a stationary bicycle, step machine, inclined bench and pull up bar. Interlocutors noted that the most popular form of exercise between April and October is basketball.

----- Religion -----

13. Inmates are free to practice their religion of choice. Formal religious ceremonies for practitioners of Catholicism and Orthodoxy are conducted in the on-site chapel. Inmates held in the maximum-security wing may

receive services in their cells, as can those of other
faiths.

Comment

14. Though most mischief-causing American tourists will
see nothing more severe than the local police station
holding tank, those that find themselves in Lukiskes prison
awaiting adjudication of their case will likely find the
conditions tolerable and humane.

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